

THOMPSON, CHENEY, & SCHIFF OPENING STATEMENTS AT SELECT COMMITTEE HEARING

Jun 21, 2022

- As Delivered -

Chairman Thompson: “Good afternoon.

“At our last hearing, we told the story of a scheme driven by Donald Trump to pressure former Vice President Mike Pence to illegally overturn the election results. We showed that when that pressure campaign failed and Mike Pence fulfilled his constitutional obligations, Donald Trump turned a violent mob loose on him. We showed that the mob came within roughly forty feet of the Vice President.

“Today we’ll show that what happened to Mike Pence wasn’t an isolated part of Donald Trump’s scheme to overturn the election. In fact, pressuring public servants into betraying their oaths was a fundamental part of the playbook.

“And a handful of election officials in several key states stood between Donald Trump and the upending of American democracy.

“As we begin today, it’s important to remember: when we count the votes for President, we count the votes state by state. For the most part, the candidate who wins the popular vote in a state wins all of that state’s Electoral College votes, and whoever wins a majority of the Electoral College votes wins the presidency.

“So when Donald Trump tried to overturn the election results, he focused on just a few states.

“He wanted officials at the local and state level to say the vote was tainted by widespread

fraud and throw out the results, even though, as we showed last week, there wasn't any voter fraud that could have overturned the election results.

"And like Mike Pence, these public servants wouldn't go along with Donald Trump's scheme. And when they wouldn't embrace the big lie and substitute the will of the voters with Donald Trump's will to remain in power. Donald Trump worked to ensure they'd face the consequences. Threats to people's livelihoods and lives. Threats of violence that Donald Trump knew about and amplified.

"As in our other hearings, we can't just look backward at what happened in late 2020 and early 2021. Because the danger hasn't gone away.

"Our democracy endured a mighty test on January 6th and in the days before. We say our institutions held.

"But what does that really mean?

"Democratic institutions aren't abstractions or ideas. They're local officials who oversee elections. Secretaries of state. People in whom we've placed our trust that they'll carry out their duties. But what if they don't?

"Two weeks ago, New Mexico held its primary elections. One county commission refused to certify the results, citing vague, unsupported claims dealing with Dominion voting machines. Courts stepped in, saying New Mexico law required the commission to certify the results.

"Two of the three members of the commission finally relented. One still refused, saying his vote, quote, 'isn't based on any evidence, it's not based on any facts, it's only based on my gut feeling and my own intuition, and that's all I need.' By the way, a few months ago, this county commissioner was found guilty of illegally entering the Capitol grounds on January 6th.

"This story reminds us of a few things: First, as we've shown in our previous hearings, claims that widespread voter fraud tainted the 2020 presidential election have always been a lie. Donald Trump knew they were a lie and he kept amplifying them anyway. Everything we describe today—the relentless, destructive pressure campaign on state and local officials—was all based on a lie. Donald Trump knew it. He did it anyway.

"Second, the lie hasn't gone away. It's corrupting our democratic institutions. People who believe that lie are now seeking positions of public trust. And as seen in New Mexico, their oath to the people they serve will take a back seat to their commitment to the Big Lie.

“If that happens, who will make sure our institutions don’t break under the pressure? We won’t have close calls. We’ll have catastrophe.

“My distinguished colleague from California, Mr. Schiff, will present much of the Select Committee’s findings on this matter.

“First, I’m pleased to recognize our Vice Chair, Ms. Cheney of Wyoming, for any opening statement she’d care to offer.

* * *

Vice Chair Cheney: “Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

“Today, we will be examining President Trump’s effort to overturn the election by exerting pressure on state officials and state legislatures. Donald Trump had a direct and personal role in this effort, as did Rudy Giuliani, as did John Eastman. In other words, the same people who were attempting to pressure Vice President Mike Pence to reject electoral votes illegally, were also simultaneously working to reverse the outcome of the 2020 election at the state level. Each of these efforts to overturn the election is independently serious; each deserves attention both by Congress and our Department of Justice. But, as a federal court has already indicated, these efforts were also part of a broader plan. And all of this was done in preparation for January 6th.

“I would note two points for particular focus today:

“First, today you will hear about calls made by President Trump to officials of Georgia and other states. As you listen to these tapes, keep in mind what Donald Trump already knew at the time he made those calls – he had been told over and over again that his stolen election allegations were nonsense. For example, this is what former Attorney General Bill Barr said to President Trump about allegations in Georgia.

[multimedia]

“And Acting Deputy Attorney General Richard Donoghue told Donald Trump this:

[multimedia]

“Mr. Trump was told by his own advisors that he had no basis for his stolen election claims, yet he continued to pressure state officials to change the election results.

“Second, you will hear about a number of threats and efforts to pressure state officials to reverse the election outcome.

“One of our witnesses today, Gabriel Sterling, explicitly warned President Trump about potential violence on December 1st 2020, more than a month before January 6th. You will see excerpts from that video repeatedly today:

[multimedia]

“The point is this: Donald Trump didn’t care about the threats of violence. He did not condemn them, he made no effort to stop them; he went forward with his fake allegations anyway.

“One more point: I would urge all of those watching today to focus on the evidence the Committee will present. Do not be distracted by politics. This is serious. We cannot let America become a nation of conspiracy theories and thug violence.

“Finally, I want to thank our witnesses today for all your service to the country. Today all America will hear about the selfless actions of these men and women, who acted honorably to uphold the rule of law, protect our freedom and preserve our Constitution. Today, Mr. Chairman, we will all see an example of what makes America great.

“Thank you. I yield back.”

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Chairman Thompson: “Without objection, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Schiff, for an opening statement.”

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Representative Schiff: “Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Madam Vice Chair.

“November 3rd, 2020, Donald Trump ran for re-election to the office of the Presidency, and he lost. His opponent, Joe Biden, finished ahead in the key battleground states of Arizona, Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Georgia and elsewhere. Nevertheless, and for the first time in history, the losing presidential candidate fought to hold onto power. As we have seen in previous hearings, he did so through a variety of means.

“On Election Day, he sought to stop the counting of the vote, knowing that the millions of absentee ballots elections officials would be counting on Election Day and thereafter would run strongly against him and deliver a victory to Joe Biden. Next, and when he could not stop the counting, he tried to stop state legislatures and governors from certifying the results of the election. He went to court and filed dozens of frivolous lawsuits, making unsubstantiated claims of fraud.

“When that too failed, he mounted a pressure campaign directed at individual state legislators to try to get them to go back into session and either declare him the winner, de-certify Joe Biden as the winner, or send two slates of electors to Congress — one for Biden and one for him — and pressure Vice President Pence to choose him as the winner.

“But the state legislatures wouldn’t go along with this scheme, and neither would the Vice President. None of the legislatures agreed to go back into special session and declare him the winner. No legitimate state authority in the states Donald Trump lost would agree to appoint fake Trump electors and send them to Congress. But this didn’t stop the Trump campaign either. They assembled groups of individuals in key battleground states and got them to call themselves electors, created phony certificates associated with these fake electors and then transmitted these certificates to Washington, and to the Congress, to be counted during the joint session of Congress on January 6th.

“None of this worked. But according to federal district judge David Carter, former President Trump and others likely violated multiple federal laws by engaging in this scheme — including conspiracy to defraud the United States. You will hear evidence of the former president and his top advisor’s direct involvement in key elements of this plot, or what Judge Carter called a ‘coup in search of a legal theory.’

“For as the judge explained, ‘President Trump’s pressure campaign to stop the electoral count did not end with Vice President Pence – it targeted every tier of federal and state elected officials. Convincing state legislatures,’ he said, ‘to certify competing electors was essential to stop the count and ensure President Trump’s reelection.’

“As we have seen in our prior hearings, running through this scheme was a Big Lie that the election was plagued with massive fraud and somehow stolen.

“You will remember what the President’s own Attorney General, Bill Barr, said he told the president about these claims of massive fraud affecting the outcome of the election.

[multimedia]

“The President’s lie was — and is — a dangerous cancer on the body politic. If you can convince Americans that they cannot trust their own elections, that anytime they lose, it is somehow illegitimate, then what is left but violence to determine who should govern?

“This brings us to the focus of today’s hearing. When state elections officials refused to stop the count, Donald Trump and his campaign tried to put pressure on them. When state executive officials refused to certify him the winner of states he lost, he applied more

pressure. When state legislators refused to go back into session and appoint Trump electors, he amped up the pressure yet again. Anyone who got in the way of Donald Trump's continued hold on power after he lost the election was the subject of a dangerous and escalating campaign of pressure.

"This pressure campaign brought angry phone calls and texts, armed protests, intimidation, and, all too often, threats of violence and death. State legislators were singled out. So too were statewide elections officials. Even local elections workers, diligently doing their jobs, were accused of being criminals, and had their lives turned upside down.

"As we will show, the president's supporters heard the former president's claims of fraud, and the false allegations he made against state and local officials, as a call to action.

[multimedia]

"This pressure campaign against state and local officials spanned numerous contested states, as you will see in this video produced by the Select Committee.

[multimedia]

"The state pressure campaign and the danger it posed to state officials and at state capitols around the nation, was a dangerous precursor to the violence we saw on January 6th at the U.S. Capitol.

"Today, you will hear from Rusty Bowers, the Republican Speaker of the Arizona House of Representatives. He will tell us about his conversations with the President, with Rudy Giuliani and John Eastman, and what the President's team asked of him, and how his oath of office would not permit it.

"You will then hear from Brad Raffensperger, the Republican Secretary of State of Georgia, who Trump directed to 'find' 11,780 votes that did not exist, but just the exact number of votes needed to overtake Joe Biden.

"You will also hear from Gabriel Sterling, his Chief Operating Officer, about the spurious claims of fraud in the elections in Georgia, and who, responding to a cascading set of threats to his elections team, warned the president to stop — that someone was going to get killed.


"And you will hear from Wandrea' "Shaye" Moss, a former local elections worker in Fulton County, Georgia, about how all of the lies about the election impacted the lives of real people who administer our elections. And still do.


“You will hear what they experienced when the most powerful man in the world — the President of the United States — sought to cling to power after being voted out of office by the American people.


“The system held, but barely. And the system held because people of courage, Republicans and Democrats, like the witnesses you will hear today, put their oath to the country and the constitution above any other consideration. They did their jobs. As we must do ours.

“Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.”

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